

THE INFLUENCE OF ERIC WHITACRE'S COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE
IN THE MUSIC OF EMERGING CHORAL COMPOSERS

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THEODORE HICKS

DR. ANDREW CROW - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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STUDENT: Theodore Hicks

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Eric Whitacre has been recognized as one of the most prominent choral composers of the twenty-first century. Although his compositions feature the frequent use of chords and clusters that would traditionally be considered dissonant, he is able to avoid the perception of dissonance through specific compositional techniques, allowing his works to remain accessible and attainable to audiences and performers alike. This study explores the influence of Whitacre's compositional techniques in the works of more recent composers. Using analytical techniques identified by Andrew Larson for exploring textural density, chord construction based on the harmonic series, and smooth voice leading techniques, there is compelling evidence of Whitacre's influence displayed in the sampled works of emerging composers Michael J. Mills, Alex Berko, Timothy C. Takach, and Theodore Hicks. Using side-by-side examples and synthesized analytical techniques, the analysis primarily compares three choral works of Whitacre ("Go, Lovely Rose," "A Boy and a Girl," and "Sleep") with a composition from each of the subsequent composers. The analysis suggests that Whitacre's influence is strong, but each composer uses the techniques in different ways to give voice to their own unique compositional style.

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INTRODUCTION

Eric Whitacre has achieved widespread recognition as an American composer and is frequently referred to as one of the leading choral composers of the 21st century.¹ With a compositional style shaped by composers such as John Corigliano, Morten Lauridsen, and René Clausen, Whitacre's use of chord clusters and simultaneous sonorities based on the harmonic series and extended tertian harmony brings a distinctive character to his music that has become recognizable in current choral offerings. As Whitacre's music came to prominence in the first decade of the 21st century, younger composers began to emerge using some of the same compositional techniques as Whitacre. These younger composers appear to be influenced by Whitacre's style while exploring ways of modifying it to create their own unique compositional voice.

While some researchers have published analytical studies of Whitacre's music itself, they rarely reach a clear consensus on the appropriate method for analysis. Beyond such analysis, relatively little research has been published to explore the influence of Whitacre's style upon subsequent choral composers; therefore, I will explore different forms of analysis of Whitacre's music and assess the degree of the influence of Whitacre's choral works on a select group of subsequent choral compositions. Of course, influence is difficult to trace. One possible method of observing influence is through score comparisons, noting similar compositional techniques between composers. Another method of tracking influence is through interviewing the composers themselves and inquiring about their composition instructors, musical background,

¹ Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 760-761; Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2002), 250-251; Owen, Kenneth Lee, "Stylistic Traits in the Choral Works of Lauridsen, Whitacre, and Clausen (1995-2005)" (D.M.A. dissertation, Arizona State University, 2008), 1; André de Quadros, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 81, 125.

and who they perceive to have influenced their style. I will utilize both methods in this study as data points and discuss the potential influence Whitacre has had over these composers. As I analyze and research these compositions, it is worth noting that exploring a single composition cannot define a composer's voice; rather, it gives some insight as to their own compositional style that warrants further research and analysis.

METHOD OF APPROACH: ANALYZING THE WORKS OF ERIC WHITACRE

First, I will highlight relevant analytical processes that scholars have found useful in understanding Whitacre's music and will focus comparisons primarily on three of his compositions: "Go, Lovely Rose" (2001), "Sleep" (2002), and "A Boy and a Girl" (2004). To consider composers for this study, I selected several composers at different points in their compositional careers or output. To find more recent composers, I sampled several young choral composers through researching the archives of the Raymond W. Brock Student Composition Competition², sponsored by the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). Many of these composers were young students at the time of their submissions, and selecting them as part of the study offers some perspective into the beginning years of a composer, where perhaps the influence of another composer is more prominent. For this area, I will examine "Crossing the Bar" by Michael J. Mills and "Luna's Lullaby" by Alex Berko. I will also include an analysis of one of my own choral compositions, "The Glade," which was influenced by my experience with Whitacre's choral music.

² From the American Choral Directors Association Website,
https://acda.org/ACDA/About-Root/Brock_Contest/Brock_Home.aspx

Lastly, I researched music publishers that advertise and sell the music of newer composers, such as Graphite Publishing, to sample composers who were more established and selling works regularly. After browsing through the composers and their works, I selected for analysis “Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers” by Timothy C. Takach.

Though many choral scholars generally identify cluster chords as part of Whitacre’s trademark compositional style, it has been a challenge to the field to find the most effective system of analysis regarding his compositional method. Dennis Shrock identifies Whitacre’s music as pandiatonic or using the diatonic scale without adhering to the traditional “limitations” of tonality.³ Kenneth Owen describes Whitacre’s music as extended diatonicism with the combined use of mixed interval chords and “secundal harmony.”⁴ Chester Alwes recognizes some of Whitacre’s compositions as examples of limited aleatoricism.⁵ Angela Hall creates her own system of labeling individual chord structures in Whitacre’s compositions in a way that identifies the number of notes in each chord with the first number, notates the intervals between notes with their pitch class number relative to the lowest note, and within the structure indicates a “register shift”⁶ with slashes (with the exception of the first slash, which only isolates the first number).⁷ For instance, the classification [11/02479e/0279e]⁸ has eleven notes in the chord cluster, the lowest note (no matter where it is on the staff) is notated as “0,” and then interval

³ Shrock, 760. His use of the word “pandiatonic” is more commentary than detailed analysis.

⁴ Owen, 4-8.

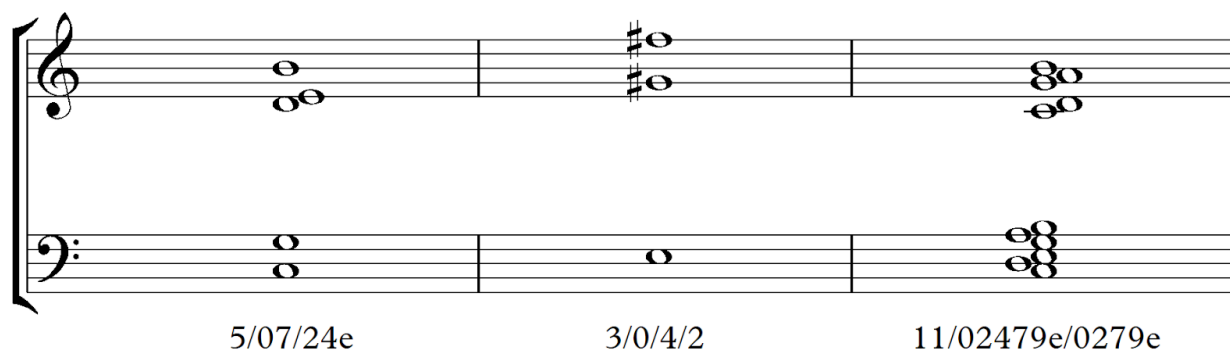
⁵ Chester Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, Vol 2, Romanticism Through the Avant-Garde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 255.

⁶ Angela Hall, “Added-Tone Sonorities in the Choral Music of Eric Whitacre,” (master’s thesis, Washington University, 2012), 49-50. “The slash implies a change of register... For ease of interpretation, intervals larger than eleven semitones are represented by their mod12 equivalent.

⁷ Hall, 49-50. After analyzing 1,102 measures, Hall also reported 1,151 unique, non-triadic chord structures.

⁸ Hall’s identification system uses “e” for interval class 11 and “t” for interval class 10.

distances are noted from the lowest note, with one register shift in this particular example. Some examples are noted below in Figure 1.



is clear that finding the most efficient analytical approach for Whitacre's music has been a challenge researchers still face. The purpose of my research is not to declare one system as superior; instead, I will highlight certain systems throughout my analysis as they best relate to highlighting Whitacre's compositional influence on subsequent composers.

Though his music utilizes dissonant chord structures and harmonic progressions, Whitacre's style strategically utilizes smooth voice leading to avoid the feeling of dissonance and creates sonorities that are accessible and pleasant to listeners. Generally, the role of dissonance in music leading up to the twentieth century was to create tension that would release into consonance and more "pleasant" harmonies. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines dissonance as "a lack of agreement; a mingling of sounds that strike the ear harshly; a mingling of discordant sounds; *especially, music*: a clashing or unresolved musical interval or chord."¹² Psychoacoustical studies (the research of sound perception) of dissonance have determined that dissonance is perceived when frequencies are close enough that they create "roughness," or rapid beating.¹³ This creates a physical response that Whitacre has even described himself:

Arvo Pärt, early on, was a massive influence for me... it seems that Arvo Pärt finds these chords that feel like they're static and not moving at all, and yet it's as if they are plummeting forward at the speed of light. It's the strangest effect, and I was instantly drawn to it; from my very first experiences singing in the chorus, I would get literally - physically - tickled by close harmonies together: the major and minor seconds. It would make me giggle or tear up, but I could feel it in my body; so when I first began composing, I knew that I wanted to do those things to other singers.¹⁴

¹² Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Dissonance," accessed February 10, 2019.
<www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dissonance.>

¹³ Phil N Johnson-Laird., Olivia E. Kang, Yuan Chang Leong, "On Musical Dissonance," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 30, no. 1 (September 2012), 19.

¹⁴ Eric Whitacre, interview by Nolan Gasser, November 15, 2010, Classical Archives, Accessed February 10, 2019.
<https://www.classicalarchives.com/feature/whitacre_interview.html.>

Whitacre's response is an example of how, even though certain intervals may generally be more dissonant (such as the major and minor seconds), the perception of dissonance is not necessarily negative. Furthermore, if the dissonance is set up with certain compositional techniques, it is actually accessible and pleasant to listeners instead of "harsh" or "clashing." Interestingly, Philip Swan asked Whitacre about his own perception using dissonance in his compositions.

You know, it's funny. I never think of it as dissonance. It doesn't seem dissonant at all to me. It just seems beautiful. And then everybody else asks me, they say, you know, "Ah, but the chords are so dissonant, but they still sound nice." To me they're not dissonant. I don't know if I've completely lost my ability to tell anymore? Like a C major chord with an F in it sounds just like a C major chord to me in a way.¹⁵

To explore this strategic approach of avoiding the perception of dissonance, I will first compare compositions utilizing a method devised by Andrew Larson. Larson explores the idea of setting up these dissonances with certain kinds of voice-leading as it relates to textural density.¹⁶ He categorizes seven different voice-leading techniques that help to give Whitacre his distinctive style. They are briefly summarized below:

- 1) Internal Stepwise Motion: expansion or condensation of *divisi* through a stepwise motion in one or more voices.
- 2) Internal Leap Motion: Like the first, but the voices instead move by leap instead of a step.
- 3) Additive/Subtractive by Scale or Leap: As a line ascends or descends through a series of leaps or steps, a single voice part remains on each pitch of the ascending series to create a cluster.
- 4) Direct Increase or Decrease: Abrupt increase or decrease of notes present in the texture.
- 5) Triadic Increase or Decrease: Directly adding or removing triads.

¹⁵ Phillip A. Swan, "In His Own Words: The Choral Music of Eric Whitacre from 1991-2004," (D.M.A. dissertation, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, 2016,) 24.

¹⁶ Larson, 44-82.

- 6) Counterpoint: Textural density fluctuates as voices enter or drop out.
- 7) Melody versus Chord and Accompaniment: Textural density does not vary greatly in this method, but is worth mentioning for a thorough examination of his technique.

Kenneth Owen provides the next idea to help analyze Whitacre's music. Owen posits that using certain devices of rhythm, articulation, and texture also help to define Whitacre's harmonic sonorities and cluster chords.¹⁷ With such harmonically and texturally dense writing, it can be a challenge to allow the text to remain clear and discernable to listeners. In fact, Whitacre claims that there is nothing more important than text when considering setting music.¹⁸ In using free meter/*rubato*, legato articulation, homophonic blocks in polyphony, Whitacre can achieve the clarity and expression of text through his use of cluster chords and dissonance.¹⁹

The third method I will use to compare compositions is what Stefan Kostka refers to as "secundal harmony."²⁰ This philosophy is centered around harmonies that are built primarily upon the interval of a second, which Whitacre uses frequently in his compositions. As a point of clarification, this idea relates to chords built only upon the intervals of a second (such as Larson's "Additive/Subtractive by Scale or Leap") or features a prominent, unresolved second in a pair of voices.

Lastly, Angela Hall observes that Whitacre uses traditionally consonant intervals in the lowest voices (such as the octave and perfect 5th) and closer, more dissonant intervals (like the

¹⁷ Owen, 1-2.

¹⁸ Whitacre, from Classical Archives interview: "With vocal and choral music, first and foremost it's the text: not only do I need to serve the text, but the text - when I'm doing it right - acts as the perfect 'blueprint,' and all the architecture is there; the poet has done the heavy lifting, so my job is to find the soul of the poem, and then somehow translate that into music.

¹⁹ Owen, 79-86.

²⁰ Stefan Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 63.

minor and major second) in the higher voices, emulating the harmonic series (outlined in Figure 2).²¹ In particular, Whitacre prefers the perfect fifth over other intervals for the lower voices (or the second and third partials of the harmonic series.) Using choral planing and parallelism, Whitacre's music contains parallel fifths and octaves in an attempt to keep chords in which the harmonic series can be easily reinforced with upper voices. Identifying and comparing the use of this technique within the selected compositions will be my last form of analysis.



Figure 2: Harmonic Series using staff notation²²

These methods of voice-leading techniques, analyzing rhythmic and textural shifts, considering “secundal harmony,” and constructing chords that resemble the harmonic series are displayed often in the works of Eric Whitacre. In referencing these techniques, the rest of this study will shift focus to more recent composers and their compositions in an attempt to explore Whitacre's possible influence over their compositional style.

²¹ Hall, 52.

²² Reginald Bain “The Harmonic Series: A path to understanding musical intervals, scales, tuning, and timbre,” University of South Carolina based website (2003). Accessed February 8, 2019. <<http://in.music.sc.edu/fs/bain/atmi02/hs/index-noaudio.html>>

“CROSSING THE BAR” BY MICHAEL MILLS

Michael J. Mills is a choral music educator from Salt Lake City, Utah, now living and teaching in Topeka, Kansas. His first experience with composition was in high school, where his choir director, Erin Tall, allowed Mills to write for the school chamber choir.²³ Mills began his studies in choral music education and composition at Utah State University, studying composition with Dean Madsen, who expanded Mills’s knowledge of non-tertian harmonies.²⁴ Mills went on to complete his undergraduate degree at University of Utah, and in 2010, he was awarded the ACDA Raymond Brock Student Composition Award for “Crossing the Bar.” The composition uses Alfred Lord Tennyson’s text, and the sheet music provides further information on Tennyson’s motivations for the text.

The poem describes his attitude toward death... In the poem he uses the sand bar to describe the barrier between life and death. In order to reach the shore, the ocean waves must crash against the sandbar, creating a sound that Tennyson describes as the “moaning of the bar.”²⁵

The original poem is only four stanzas, but there is an additional verse Mills adds before the final verse, using biblical text from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20-22 and 55. Mills wrote in an email interview explaining that he had written most of the piece, but was stuck on this last portion of the work, writing “I had nothing there but felt like there was something needed.”²⁶ Mills’s interpretation of Tennyson’s text reaffirms Mills’s spiritual beliefs, and therefore he felt it was appropriate to add the Bible verses where he felt there was something still to be heard in the composition.

²³ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

²⁴ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

²⁵ Michael J. Mills, *Crossing the Bar*, (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2010), 2.

²⁶ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

The composition is written for eight-part unaccompanied chorus, with as many as a nine individual voice parts at one time. While there are many stylistic traits that create a unique compositional voice within “Crossing the Bar,” there are also some traits that seem to point to the influence of Whitacre’s choral music. It begins immediately in measure one, where the second sopranos, tenors and basses outline a D-major triad and move to a cluster chord in measure two comprised of both D-major and G-major triads (Example 1.1). This same sonority happens again in measures 40 and 41.

Example 1.1. Michael Mills, *Crossing the Bar*, mm. 1-2.

Example 1.1 shows the musical score for measures 1-2 of Michael Mills' *Crossing the Bar*. The score is for an eight-part unaccompanied chorus with parts S2, T1, T2, B1, and B2. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. In measure 1, all parts have a whole note D. In measure 2, the parts move to a cluster chord: S2 and T1 have whole notes D and F#, T2 has a whole note D, B1 has a whole note G, and B2 has a whole note D. The lyrics "Sun - set," are written below the staves. Roman numerals I_4^6 and I_4^6/IV^6 are indicated below the bass staves.

Example 1.2. Eric Whitacre, *A Boy and a Girl*, m.25.

Example 1.2 shows the musical score for measure 25 of Eric Whitacre's *A Boy and a Girl*. The score is for a four-part unaccompanied chorus with parts S, A, T, and B. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. In measure 25, the parts have half notes: S has D and F#, A has D and F#, T has D and F#, and B has D and F#. The lyrics "clouds_ ex" are written below the staves. Roman numerals iii , iii/VI^4 , and VI^9 are indicated below the bass staff.

This example exhibits the same kind of voice-leading that Larson claims makes Whitacre’s music sound unique. Specifically, Mills references two kinds of voice leading techniques from

Larson's list above: "triadic increase" and "additive by leap." Examples 1.1 and 1.2 show examples of triadic increase from Mills and Whitacre side by side, where the composers increase textural density by adding a second triad to the previous harmony. Examples 2.1 and 2.2 display the technique "additive by leap" in a short passage by each composer, where an ascending or descending line leaps while a single voice part remains on each pitch to create a cluster. Though they do not spell the same chord, the function of the textural density increase creates the same effect in both instances.

Example 2.1. Michael Mills, *Crossing the Bar*, mm. 40-41.

Textural density: 1 2 3 4

Example 2.2. Eric Whitacre, *Go, Lovely Rose*, m. 13.

Textural density: 1 2 3 4 5 4 4

"Crossing the Bar" also features harmonies with featured intervals of a major and minor seconds, which alludes to the secundal harmonies that Whitacre uses frequently. In particular, Mills features seconds most prominently in the soprano and alto sections when he begins using

biblical text (measures 31-39). Whitacre's use of this same kind of secundal harmony in the upper voices is evident in "A Boy and a Girl." Mills also changes the meter from 4/4 to 3/4 in the biblical section, which, along with the highlighted secundal harmony (Example 3.1 and 3.2, shown with boxes), creates stronger musical tension and drive to the fermata in measure 39.

Whitacre employs the same effect, changing the meter to match the natural prosody of the text while using secundal harmony in "A Boy and a Girl" to create a sense of urgency and motion.

Example 3.1. Michael Mills, *Crossing the Bar*, mm. 30-35.

31 Broadly

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

S1 Though death comes to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O death, where is

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

S2 Though death comes to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O death, where is

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

A1 Though death comes to all, to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O death, where is

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

A2 Though death comes to all men, Christ has o'er-come, o'er-come death! O

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

T1 Though death comes to all, to all men, Christ has o'er-come, o'er-come death! O

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

T2 Though death comes to all, to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O death, where is

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

B1 Though death comes to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O

mf *f* *mf* *cresc. e poco accel.*

B2 Though death comes to all men, Christ has o'er-come! O

Example 3.2. Eric Whitacre, *A Boy and a Girl*, mm. 21-24.

The musical score for Example 3.2, Eric Whitacre's *A Boy and a Girl*, measures 21-24, is presented for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "sa - voring their limes giv - ing their kiss - es like". The score features dynamic markings of mezzo-forte (*mf*) and triplet markings (3). The lyrics are written below the staves, with some words underlined to indicate specific musical treatments.

Even though text-painting is a historical practice and not exclusive to any one composer, there are still notable similarities in the techniques of Whitacre and Mills. For instance, Mills's ending of "sunset" features notes on a D-major chord on the syllable "sun," and then immediately drop to a lower chord stacking on the following syllable to portray the sun setting. Whitacre also uses this kind of text-painting in "A Boy and a Girl" in the final verse, where all four voice parts have descending parts for the text "stretched out underground."

Though there appear to be several moments that have hinted at Whitacre's influence, Mills's composition stands on its own as a unique choral work. The biggest difference is the predominant melodic motives in Mills's work, where Whitacre tends to prioritize harmonic color and textural density over a distinctive melody. In fact, Mills assigns two parts to sing the melody together for the majority of the piece, allowing for proper balance and melodic prominence

throughout the thick musical texture. Mills also uses a variety of other compositional techniques, including the use of overlapping ostinatos to create a constantly moving harmony (Example 4).

Example 4. Michael Mills, *Crossing the Bar*, mm. 18-21.

The musical score for Example 4, Michael Mills' *Crossing the Bar*, measures 18-21, is presented below. The score is for a choir with parts S1, S2, A1, A2, T1, T2, B1, and B2. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Twi - light, eve ning bell, Twi - light, eve ning bell, Twi - light and eve - ning bell, And af - ter that the dark! And".

The score features a thick musical texture with overlapping ostinatos. The lyrics are: "Twi - light, eve ning bell, Twi - light, eve ning bell, Twi - light and eve - ning bell, And af - ter that the dark! And".

When asked which composer influenced his writing the most, Mills's response did not affirm any specific influence from Whitacre's compositional style. As a choral music educator, he enjoys studying many kinds of choral music not only to teach his students, but also he "look[s] at them with a compositional eye as well,"²⁷ implying that his compositional style is

²⁷ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

shaped by many different composers. When quoting a specific composer who influenced him the most, he referenced the compositional process of Johannes Brahms.

I guess, if I had to choose one composer that I feel like has influenced me is Johannes Brahms. It's not necessarily his compositional style, but his compositional process. I read that he did the majority of his composing away from a piano. He would take walks in the woods and do much of his composing in his head and then come back to the keyboard to test out his ideas. I feel like I do some of my best composing as I'm going about doing other things.²⁸

Though Mills did not directly cite Whitacre's choral work as an influence over "Crossing the Bar," his compositional style seems to hint at some influence. In addition, through studying many different styles of choral music as an educator, Mills has likely encountered several of Whitacre's works as they are a popular repertoire choice performed by academic choirs around the world. For example, as of 2019, "Sleep" is officially on twelve state school music association repertoire lists as well as three festival lists,²⁹ and "A Boy and a Girl" is on seven state lists and two festival lists.³⁰ Through exploring certain elements of Mills compositional choices as well as his background as an educator, I posit that Whitacre's compositional style has indirectly influenced Mills's style of writing.

"LUNA'S LULLABY" BY ALEX BERKO

Alex Berko, at the age of 24, is already an award-winning composer, arranger, and pianist. He began composition lessons with Stephen Stanziano at the age of 12, and after a transformational experience at the Interlochen Camp for the Arts in Michigan, he decided he

²⁸ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

²⁹ J.W. Pepper and Son, Inc. website, "Sleep," (Exton, PA: J.W. Pepper and Son, Inc., 2019). <<https://www.jwpepper.com/Sleep/3295903.item#/>> Accessed 17 February, 2019.

³⁰ J.W. Pepper and Son, Inc. website, "A Boy and a Girl," (Exton, PA: J.W. Pepper and Son, Inc., 2019). <<https://www.jwpepper.com/A-Boy-and-a-Girl/3301920.item#/>> Accessed 17 February, 2019.

would continue musical study in college.³¹ He continued studying composition while in high school and took lessons at the Cleveland Institute of Music with Keith Fitch. He then earned his Bachelor of Music degree in composition from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, having taken composition lessons with Don Freund, Aaron Travers, Claude Baker, and David Dzubay. Berko is being commissioned around the world and has won many accolades over the past several years, including national recognition of his work from the Society of Composers, Inc. (SCI), the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), ACDA, and the Cleveland Institute of Music.³²

“Luna’s Lullaby” is an 8-minute choral piece written for SATB voices and four percussion parts. Berko wrote the piece when he was still attending Solon High School, and collaborated with a fellow student, Jessica Stone, to write the lyrics for a new composition.³³ Berko explains in an interview that the piece was the first he had written for choir, and like many young composers, pulled ideas and concepts from the composers he loved at the time.³⁴ In fact, he references Whitacre as one of his most prominent influences as a young composer, as well as vocal jazz and barbershop harmonies.

I think it's fairly obvious from the harmonic language that Eric Whitacre was a clear influence. At the time, we were singing a good amount of his music in choir and I hadn't heard anything like it. The more I've talked to composers of choir, I've found that nearly all of them have been influenced by Eric Whitacre in some way or another and have AT LEAST one "Whitacre"-inspired piece in their catalogue. I think I was particularly drawn to him because I naturally gravitate to a sound in my writing that is based in elements of contemporary pop music and when I heard Whitacre and realized that he was essentially writing glorified slowed-down pop music with all sorts of extended harmonies/clusters (perhaps a fairly gross generalization), it scratched all sorts of itches for me.

³¹ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

³² Alex Berko, “About,” <<http://www.alexberko.com/about/>> Accessed 17 February 2019.

³³ Lisa Kodish Berko, “Young Solon Composer Debuts ‘Luna’s Lullaby,’” Patch Media Website, <<https://patch.com/ohio/solon/young-solon-composer-debuts-lunas-lullaby>>

³⁴ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

Example 5.2. Eric Whitacre, *Go, Lovely Rose*, mm. 1-2.

S *pp* *mp*
 Go, love - ly rose
 A *pp* *mp*
 Go, love - ly rose
 T *pp* *mp*
 Go, love - ly rose
 B *pp* *mp*
 Go, love - ly rose
 Textural Density: 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 4

Continuing with voice leading that adds textural density, Berko still demonstrates influence of Whitacre’s style in using what Larson describes as “additive by scale or leap.” For example, in Example 6.1, sopranos and altos begin with the word “patiently” on a unison note, and as the word is repeated the lower voices enter in from the previous note and continue a downward trajectory with a combination of steps and leaps, ending in an extended tertian form of an inverted F-major chord. With each new note, the textural density is increased by one, resulting in a passage that begins with one unison note and ending with eight distinct pitches. The same technique is found in Whitacre’s “Go, Lovely Rose” (Example 6.2)

39

ff quickly

S Then die, _____

ff quickly

A Then die, then die, _____

ff molto rit.

T Then die, _____

molto rit. ff

B Then die, _____

Textural density: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

In referencing Hall's observation of Whitacre's construction of chords that resemble the harmonic series, Berko seems to follow this method in sections of "Luna's Lullaby." When chords become more texturally dense, the composers construct the chords in a way that adheres to the harmonic series to bring clarity to the chord. Using larger, more consonant intervals in the bottom voices (perfect fifths and major sixths) while using closer intervals in the upper voices. A prime example of this technique happens in "Luna's Lullaby" from measures 61 to 63 (Example 7.1). Berko uses the second, third, and fifth partials primarily in the bass and tenor voices and is able to add non-triadic tones (like a major seventh or major second) in upper voices and still maintain a clear sonority. In adhering to these principles, one observes the use of several parallel fifths and choral planing, or extensive parallel motion in the voices, to maintain the structure of the chord. The same choral planing and attention to the harmonic series can also

be distinguished in Whitacre's "A Boy and a Girl" (Example 7.2) In looking at the figures, the numbers next to each note represent which partial of the harmonic series the note is functioning as.

Example 7.1. Alex Berko, *Luna's Lullaby*, mm. 62-63.

Example 7.2. Eric Whitacre, *A Boy and a Girl*, mm.15-17.

Berko is also able to deviate from Whitacre techniques in using several other various compositional devices that are not necessarily attributed to Whitacre's style. For instance, in measure 74, a very close rhythmic canon on a unison note begins and the voices eventually change pitches in stepwise motion away from each other to create a dense chord cluster. In an interview response, Berko reveals that he unknowingly used a device in this section that composer Gyorgy Ligeti called "micropolyphony," where individual voices move against one another in a tight rhythmic canon to create a dense cacophony of sound.³⁵ (Example 8.)

³⁵ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

Example 8. Alex Berko, *Luna's Lullaby*, mm. 86-89.

S *f*
 is a - ri - sing the sun is a - ri - sing the day is re - vi - ving the day is re - vi - ving the day
 A *f*
 is a - ri - sing the sun is a - ri - sing the day is re - vi - ving the day is re - vi - ving the day
 T *f*
 a - ri - sing the sun is a - ri - sing the sun is a - ri - sing the day is re - vi - ving the day is
 B *f*
 ri - sing the sun is a - ri - sing the sun is a - ri - ving the day is re - vi - ving the day is re -

Berko explains that this was a device of text-painting.³⁶ In trying to represent a sunrise, he created a canon with varying entrances, growing dynamics, ranges, and increased the number of voices. This is not the only section with text painting, however. Berko uses a variety of text-painting ideas throughout the piece, including a full page of whispering vocal effects to portray “Dawn to the dusk whispers so light, good night,” and staggers the entrances over aleatoric writing in the percussion parts.

Though Berko writes for many other kinds of ensembles, it is clear by his own admission and by observing compositional techniques that his piece seems to reference the compositional trademarks of Whitacre’s choral music. However, Berko explains that his main motivation for selecting appropriate compositional devices and ideas is text.

³⁶ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

A colleague once shared with me that choosing the text is half the work in writing the choral piece and I couldn't agree more. Finding the right words to set is a difficult task, but once you've landed on them, I've found that a lot of the piece starts to write itself. A former teacher of mine also describes the process of writing a piece with text as a collaboration between you (the composer) and the poet. I think that's a beautiful way to look at it. When the poet sat down and wrote those words, they imagined an entire world unfolding in their mind. As the composer, it's your job to honor and enhance that world instead of ignoring it and potentially disrupting, destroying, or disregarding the poet's own thoughts. This is why I love to work with living poets--the collaboration seems more organic to me instead of having to guess on the intentions of the poet.³⁷

“NEITHER ANGELS, NOR DEMONS, NOR POWERS” BY TIMOTHY C. TAKACH

“Honesty, Accessibility, and Craft” are the first three words highlighted on the personal website of Timothy T. Takach. A full-time composer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Takach studied composition at St. Olaf College with Timothy Mahr, Mary Ellen Childs, and Libby Larsen.³⁸ On his first day of school at St. Olaf in 1996, he auditioned and joined the singing group *Cantus* and started his career singing bass with them for seventeen years. Takach cites his experience in *Cantus* as a significant influence over his compositional style, as the group would sing and study over one hundred pieces per year.³⁹ He left the group in 2013 to pursue a full-time career as a composer and has since received commissions from organizations around the world and frequently serves as a conductor, clinician, presenter, and composer-in-residence for events around the country.⁴⁰

Takach wrote “Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers” in 2008 for six part (SSATBB) unaccompanied voices. The composition uses a combination of biblical and non-biblical texts

³⁷ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

³⁸ Timothy C. Takach, email interview by author, February 11, 2019.

³⁹ Timothy C. Takach, “A Farewell Interview with Tim Takach,” *Cantus Website*. <<https://www.cantussings.org/2013/06/13/a-farewell-interview-with-tim-takach/>> Accessed 19 February 2019.

⁴⁰ Timothy C. Takach, “Biography,” Timothy C. Takach Website. <<http://www.timothytakach.com/biography/>> Accessed 14 February 2019.

from Psalms 121:1, Felicia Dorothea Hemans, Romans 8:38-39, and Revelation 7:17. The work was commissioned by Washburn Rural High School Choir to honor the death of a student who was killed in a car crash, Andy McLaren.⁴¹ While Takach set different texts from the Bible, he also used a line from the student's eulogy, "And I believe, so I believe," to form the main motive that unifies the piece.

Cantus had performed Whitacre's music during Takach's tenure with them, so it seems plausible that Whitacre could have some influence over Takach's own writing. The dense, homophonic choral writing using chord clusters serves as a strong indicator, but there are also other aspects that are just as prominent. Owen's ideas of analyzing Whitacre's music through observing rhythmic devices, legato articulation, and homophonic blocks of polyphony provide a clearer connection.

For example, Takach uses simple rhythms (primarily quarter notes and half notes) to allow singers to maintain a smooth and legato delivery of the lines while honoring the prosody of the text; then, he employs the use of the quarter-note triplet to increase the rhythmic intensity as the singers approach the climax of the piece. To intensify the effect further, he inserts a gradual but relentless dynamic crescendo in all the parts until it reaches the climax at the text, "Neither angels, nor demons..." In using this simple shift of rhythmic devices with an increasing dynamic intensity, Takach creates more urgency through encouraging a more speech-like pattern with the rhythms (Example 9). The same can be seen in Whitacre's "A Boy and a Girl," as Whitacre uses uncomplicated rhythms in homophony in the beginning of each verse and then adds a

⁴¹ Timothy C. Takach, "Composer's Notes," Graphite Publishing Website.
<<https://www.graphitepublishing.com/product/neither-angels-demons-powers/>> Accessed 19 February 2019.

quarter-note triplet for the words “giving their kisses” to achieve more motion and excitement (reference Example 3.2 for Whitacre’s example).

Example 9. Timothy Takach, *Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers*, mm. 35-44.

The musical score for Example 9, Timothy Takach's *Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers*, measures 35-44, is presented for five voices: Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is divided into two homophonic blocks. Homophonic Block 1 (S1, S2, A) spans measures 35-44, with dynamics *mf*, *f*, and *ff*. Homophonic Block 2 (T, B) spans measures 35-44, with dynamics *mf* and *f*. The lyrics are: "I be - lieve. For I am convinced that nei-ther death nor life, nei-ther an-gels nor lieve. So I be-lieve. And I be-lieve. So I be - lieve in life, nei-ther an-gels nor lieve. So I be-lieve. And I be-lieve. So I be - lieve in life nei-ther an-gels nor".

Of course, increasing rhythmic intensity with quarter-note triplets is not the only device used to create a sense of excitement or building tension. Both Whitacre and Takach utilize a textural change technique that Owen refers to as “homophonic blocks in polyphony.”⁴² Whitacre’s “Sleep” displays this compositional device numerous times (Example 10). The homophonic blocks are separated soprano and alto voices from tenor and bass voices. The upper voices maintain one musical motive, while the lower voices provide a kind of counter-motive

⁴² Owen, 79.

and have different rhythms and underlying harmonies. These homophonic blocks can be seen in Takach's work as well (Example 9).

Example 10. Eric Whitacre, *Sleep*, mm. 51-55.

The musical score for Eric Whitacre's *Sleep* (mm. 51-55) is presented in four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The music is in 2/4 time and features a homophonic texture. Two specific homophonic blocks are highlighted with boxes and labels:

- Homophonic Block 1 (S, A):** This block covers the first two measures of the Soprano and Alto parts. The lyrics are "I sur-ren-der un - to sleep, As I sur-ren-der un - to sleep, ___".
- Homophonic Block 2 (T, B):** This block covers the first two measures of the Tenor and Bass parts. The lyrics are "dark and deep, dark and deep, dark".

The score also includes a section labeled "[block repeated]" for the Soprano and Alto parts, and a section labeled "Homophonic Block 2 (T, B)" for the Tenor and Bass parts. The lyrics for the repeated section are "dark and deep, dark".

By using this compositional device, both Whitacre and Takach are able to avoid a sense of sonorous clutter and pair voices in a way that brings clarity and focus to the text instead of each voice having its own line and creating a dense texture with indiscernible text. This may explain why both composers' music has been touted as "accessible" to singers and audiences alike.

Takach uses the structure of the harmonic series when spelling out chords, similar to Whitacre, to create clarity within the sound. However, Takach also utilizes the harmonic series in triads to create a sense of purity in moments of text painting. For example, in the section that

uses the text “to mar the stillness of that angel-home,” the chords are more dissonant near the beginning of the phrase, but then arrive on a pure G-flat major chord with no added notes, as if to express the purity and perfection of heaven (Example 11: the numbers correspond to the partials of the harmonic series). A few phrases later, the same device is used with the text “serenely blessed,” creating simplicity and purity amidst a dense texture.

Example 11. Timothy Takach, *Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers*, mm. 16-20.

The musical score for Example 11 shows four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics and dynamic markings. The lyrics are: "To mar the stillness of that angel-home;". The dynamics are *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *pp rit.* (pianissimo, ritardando). The Soprano part has a final note with a partial number 8. The Alto part has a final note with a partial number 6. The Tenor part has a final note with a partial number 5. The Bass part has a final note with a partial number 3 and a partial number 2. The final notes are all on a G-flat major chord.

While a triad is not necessarily a complicated sonority, it serves as a highlighted moment in the context of the dissonant chords before and afterward. In using a chord that has similar intervals to the harmonic series, Takach adds a sense of purity that would not necessarily be perceived in other stackings or inversions of the same chord.

Another interesting technique that Whitacre often employs is the lack of conventional resolution at the ends of his works. For example, “Sleep,” ends with the sopranos singing a sustained F while the remaining voices alternate between a C-major triad (a VI chord) and an inverted B-flat-major chord with an added fourth (a kind of V⁶ chord). Though the composition uses non-functional tonality, it seems to be primarily in the key of E-flat major, hence ending on a B-flat major chord gives a sense of continuation and not resolution. The ending of “Sleep” is fairly aleatoric in the sense that the conductor and ensemble can repeat the last two measures for however long it takes to achieve the dynamic reduction to a whisper, as it states is desired in the score.⁴³ These two elements create the feeling of an unresolved idea in Whitacre’s composition, and reflects the feeling of drifting off to sleep (Example 12).

Example 12. Eric Whitacre, *Sleep*, mm. 71-74.

The musical score for measures 71-74 of "Sleep" by Eric Whitacre is presented for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The Soprano part features a long, sustained note (F) with a *ppp* dynamic marking and a fermata. The other three voices (Alto, Tenor, Bass) sing the word "sleep" in a rhythmic pattern, with the Tenor part starting on a lower octave (indicated by an '8'). The score includes dynamic markings like *ppp* and *ppp* with hairpins, and repeat signs. The lyrics "sleep, _" are written below the notes.

⁴³ Eric Whitacre, *Sleep* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2002), 11. As stated in the score: “gradually reduce dynamic to a whisper, repeat and dim. al niente.”

Takach uses a similar concept in the end of “Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers.”

The key is firmly in D-flat major with no key changes throughout the piece. The final chord, however, is an G-flat major extended tertian harmony chord (a kind of IV chord). Takach expresses that it was a conscious choice to not cadence on the tonic for expression of the text (Example 13).

The basis of the piece, musically, comes from the idea that we are saying goodbye to someone who has gone on. We don’t know where, but that journey in the piece is depicted with a rising 4th. You can hear this outline several times in the melodies throughout, and also in the harmonic progressions. At the end, instead of cadencing on the tonic chord, I leave the listener on the IV chord, residing in that post-earthly place.⁴⁴

Example 13. Timothy Takach, *Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers*, mm. 64-67.

With Resolve ♩ = 70

S1 *p* And God shall wipe a - way all tears from their eyes. *molto rit.* *mp*

S2 *p* And God shall wipe a - way all tears from their eyes. *molto rit.* *mp*

A *p* And God shall wipe a - way all tears from their eyes. *molto rit.* *mp*

T *p* And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. *molto rit.* *mp*

B *p* And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes. *molto rit.* *mp*

⁴⁴ Timothy C. Takach, email interview by author, February 11, 2019.

Though Takach's composition reflects many of the same techniques found in Whitacre's works, it still maintains its own distinct character. There are many moments within the piece that the texture is varied greatly, from melody against vocal accompaniment to fully homophonic sections, and even has moments where only one or two voices are singing the main theme.

As another point of differentiation, Takach's idea of "gluing the piece together"⁴⁵ with the "And I believe" motive gives the feeling of unification throughout the piece, even though it's through-composed. Lastly, his use of triadic harmony as a color choice to communicate themes of purity and clarity seem to be another distinctive characteristic from Whitacre's works.

"THE GLADE" BY THEODORE HICKS

"The Glade" was conceived as a "power-up project" by two students of the Ball State University Chamber Choir in the Fall of 2018. Dr. Andrew Crow charges students each semester with a kind of project that would elevate the collective ensemble, ranging from presenting song studies or analyses, providing baked-goods to the ensemble, or organizing social events. The purpose is to create a stronger sense of unity within the choir, and students are often welcomed and encouraged to work with a friend or partner on the project. I had decided to reach out to a fellow classmate, Robert Klosterman, about the possibility of collaborating on a choral composition together for the choir.

While earning my undergraduate degree from Anderson University (Anderson, Indiana), I studied composition with Jonathan Brooks. I also sang in the university Chorale, where we performed several of Whitacre's choral works during my four years of undergraduate studies. He

⁴⁵Timothy C. Takach, email interview by author, February 11, 2019.

was one of my favorite composers to sing and listen to, and I referenced his techniques often in my composition lessons. In my junior year, I composed a piece for unaccompanied choir, submitted it to the Concerto-Aria Composition Contest sponsored through the university and won the honor to hear it performed by the Anderson University Chorale at the Concerto-Aria Concert in 2009. When I began public school teaching in 2010, however, I stopped composing indefinitely as I felt that I lacked the time to invest. Upon attending a workshop with Alice Parker in 2018, I was inspired by her encouragement to begin composing again.

Klosterman, a meteorology major, had previously expressed to me his love of poetry and text, and related that he occasionally writes in his leisure time. I asked him if he would consider writing a text for me to set to music so we could present it as a collaborative gift to the Ball State University Chamber Choir for our “power-up project.” Klosterman agreed, and within two weeks he had written the text for “The Glade.”

Klosterman’s text was inspired by an experience he had on a men’s retreat organized by his home church.⁴⁶ Upon presenting the text to me, he explained the allegory of walking through a dense forest and feeling lost, yet being led by a streaming light to an opening that overlooked a beautiful landscape he refers to as “the glade.” The text has religious undertones and uses imagery and verbal ironies to weave a beautiful message throughout the text.

*Under a deep blue mind, I find clarity of sky
As my spirit transcends the strife foretold.*

*The beholden world steadily thrums, with the Sun, alight and golden.*⁴⁷

Here, for example, Klosterman switches the position of the words “mind” and “sky” from where we might normally use them in speech, and explains that even in their inverted positions the

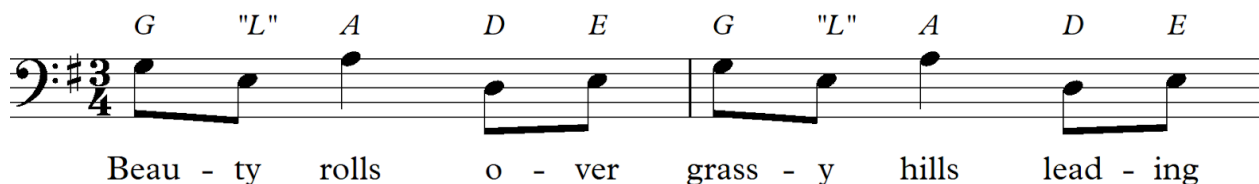
⁴⁶ Robert Klosterman, email interview by author, March 21, 2019.

⁴⁷ Robert Klosterman, excerpt from “The Glade.”

meanings are the same. In another instance, he explains that the “Sun” is capitalized, referring to Christ as “the Son of God,” and the word “alight” actually means to descend; therefore, his implied meaning of the phrase refers to the prophecy of the second coming of Jesus Christ, found in Revelation 1:7 in the Bible, “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...”⁴⁸

My understanding of his allegory reflected the idea that the opportunity of spiritual connection is found in “the glade,” so compositionally I wanted to reflect its importance. In developing the melody for the text, I recalled the historical technique used by Johann Sebastian Bach and Josquin de Prez (among many others) of occasionally using a musical cryptogram when creating a musical motive (Example 14).⁴⁹ I started there, and used the pitch “E” to substitute for the letter “L” and created the musical motive that ties the work together.⁵⁰

Example 14. Theodore Hicks, *The Glade*, mm. 28-29.



From a rhythmic standpoint, it was clear to me that the most important element of this project was the text, and I wanted to let it speak with a natural prosody and speech-like pattern, so I

⁴⁸ Revelations 1:7, *The Holy Bible*.

⁴⁹ The idea coined by Zarlino, “Soggetto cavato dalle parole,” literally meaning a “subject carved out of the words.”

⁵⁰ As tonal music theory only uses “A” through “G” to describe pitch classes, to find “L” I extended the alphabet over the diatonic “white-key” scale in a cyclical repeat of pitch to represent the subsequent letters. A-B-C-D-E-F-G / H(A)-I(B)-J(C)-K(D)-L(E), etc.

found myself changing meters often to best reflect the nature of the poetry and tried to offer a musical cadence wherever there was a poetic one (Example 15).

Example 15. Theodore Hicks, *The Glade*, mm. 47-52.

clar-i - ty of sky As my spir-it tran-scends the strife fore - told. The be - hold-en world stea-di - ly

clar-i - ty of sky As my spir-it tran-scends the, the strife fore - told. oh, _____

clar-i - ty of sky As my spir-it tran- scends the strife fore - told. oh, _____

clar-i - ty of sky As my spir-it tran-scends the strife fore - told. oh, _____

Without consciously recognizing it, I was using the rhythmic philosophy Whitacre uses in many of his choral works, where the composer changes the meter frequently to fit the word stress.⁵¹ Owen explains that “the result [of using this technique] is not an energetic rhythmic effect, but one that creates a flexible structure that downplays rhythm and emphasizes the harmonic sonorities.”⁵² One can also observe the increase of rhythmic intensity through the addition of quarter-note triplets, as noted earlier in Takach’s “Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers” (Example 9) and Whitacre’s “A Boy and a Girl” (Example 3.2).

⁵¹ Owen, 28.

⁵² Owen, 28.

Another common Whitacre trait that is found in “The Glade” is Larson’s “additive by scale” voice leading technique that is found in many of Whitacre’s work. It was not a conscious choice to model these techniques after Whitacre, I merely saw those techniques as opportunities for word-painting; I utilized the technique for “winding wooded paths,” to represent a thickening of branches; “streaming light” incorporates a descending scale to foreshadow Klosterman’s imagery in the end of “the Sun, alight and golden;” and in “onward” to create excitement and a kind of forward momentum leading into the next section (Example 16).

Example 16. Theodore Hicks, *The Glade*, mm. 12-14.

S
stream - ing light leads me e - ver on - ward...

A
stream - ing, stream - ing light leads me e - ver on - ward...

T
stream - ing light leads me e - ver on - ward.

B
-

Textural Density: 1 2 2 3 3 3 4 3 4 3 4 4 4

The construction of chords in the composition, like the others mentioned in this study, pays attention to the harmonic series, using more consonant intervals in the lower voices (Example 17, the numbers representing partials of the harmonic series). Part of that preference

comes from exposure to Whitacre's music throughout my choral experience, but also because of my own personal experience with barbershop harmonies. Though they utilize smaller intervals, barbershop harmonies often build and tune chords based on the harmonic series to reinforce the overtones, giving it the characteristic "lock and ring" sound. One also observes, in addition to the attention to the harmonic series, the use of featured seconds in the soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone voices (shown in boxes in Example 17). This alludes to the secundal harmony found in many of Whitacre's compositions.

Example 17. Theodore Hicks, *The Glade*, mm. 58-61.

The musical score for Example 17, Theodore Hicks, *The Glade*, mm. 58-61, is presented for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "I've found rest in the midst of Heaven:". The score includes dynamic markings (*mf*, *ff*), crescendo (*cresc.*), and acceleration (*accel.*) markings. There are also fingerings and breath marks indicated. Two specific intervals are highlighted with boxes: a second interval in the Soprano voice between measures 58 and 59, and a second interval in the Alto voice between measures 60 and 61.

Though my compositional style is undoubtedly influenced by the choral work of Whitacre, the differences of style lie in the harmony and exploration of the circle of fifths. "The Glade" does not utilize nearly as much divisi or chord clusters as Whitacre pieces, and the main

centerpiece around which the piece is build has to do with shifting key centers throughout the piece.

To give a brief overview, I use C major to represent “heaven,” and G major to represent “the glade.” The piece begins in the key of D minor, which reflects the dense forest, accompanied with close diatonic dissonances to represent the “arching branches” that obscure vision. When the text “while streaming light leads me ever onward,” is sung, the tonality changes to the relative, F major, and “onward” is sung on an F-major scale, but outlines a third inversion C⁷ chord, symbolizing that a journey has begun toward heaven. Then the composition takes the singers through E-flat, A-flat, and D-flat to find the way out of “the forest,” and the “opening” to the glade is presented with two pairs of ascending perfect fifths, B-flat to F to C, and an angelic soprano voice leading us into G-major. When the piece finally arrives to G major, the musical cryptogram of “GLADE” is heard for the first time. As the text begins to refer to introspective change “I stroll and wander, found in thought, turning, taking, breathing, making, myself, my life anew,” there is a subtle shift from G major to F-sharp major and the self-discovery passage lies in the keys of F-sharp major and B major. Once the text “I find clarity of sky” is sung, the chords descend (E-D-C) to finally arrive in a “heavenly place” (C major). The rest of the song is truly sung in relation to C major, until the word “golden.” The reference of a B-flat chord represents Jesus, which happen on the words “vision,” “light,” and “golden.” Then, the final phrase is sung in G major, as the poem ends in the glade, so does the music. The choice and changing of tonal centers is meant to portray the separation of heaven and earth, God and humankind, and the opportunity for reconciliation found in the glade.

CONCLUSION

In exploring these compositions, it is evident that Whitacre's compositional style has influenced newer choral composers in a variety of ways. Whether they used smooth voice-leading techniques, specific rhythmic devices, homophonic blocks of polyphony, secundal harmonies, or built chords based on the harmonic series, composers like Mills, Berko, and Takach have been able to avoid the perception of dissonance in the same way Whitacre has in utilizing these compositional techniques. Of course, as stated earlier, a composer's holistic style and process cannot be clearly defined by examining one choral work, and tracing the influence of one composer to another has no simple process or solution. Yet, these works present similarities and certain stylistic traits stand out as distinct, which can be observed (in some cases, even measured) in order to implicate possible influence.

Perhaps most important of all, the compositions explored in this study were not mere derivatives or presenting the same ideas with different notes and words. They stand alone as distinctive musical works that seem to expand upon some of Whitacre's frequently-used compositional techniques. It seems that these composers are able to deviate from Whitacre's style simply through following their own unique compositional process. While all the composers unanimously agreed that an attention to the text is the most important aspect of a choral work, each composer expressed a completely different way of approaching a new composition.

Whitacre has communicated in interviews the lack of a formalized process when he writes, implying a kind of trial and error, possibly even using a different process each time.⁵³

⁵³ Eric Whitacre, interview by Nolan Gasser, November 15, 2010, Classical Archives, <https://www.classicalarchives.com/feature/whitacre_interview.html> Accessed February 10, 2019. "Boy, I wish there was a process [laughs]. A lot of times it just feels like throwing stuff up against a wall and seeing if it sticks the next morning."

Conversely, Takach describes an attention to the imagery suggested by a text, and often makes specific compositional choices to make sure the narrative is never lost.⁵⁴ Mills, an organist, expressed an affinity for Johannes Brahms's compositional process, where most of his composing would happen away from the piano at first, then come back to test ideas, which were likely influenced by his keyboard proficiency.⁵⁵ Berko explains that as a young composer, "Luna's Lullaby" in particular was an "amalgamation of...[his] influences at the time,"⁵⁶ but specifically experimented with text painting. I found the most effective way to associate my composition with Klosterman's text was to explore different key areas through circle-of-fifths motion while tying the work together with a melodic motive. Though each composition may have employed similar devices to express the text, the motivation seems to come from a different place for each composer.

In conclusion, Whitacre's powerful sway as an American choral composer can be seen in the works of subsequent composers, though they utilize the compositional techniques in different ways to create unique choral works. The distinctive harmonic language and compositional style seems to be appearing more often in modern choral compositions and is continuing to develop through the voices of newer composers, helping to create a more diverse array of compositional techniques that are exploring expression and attention to text in the twenty-first century.

⁵⁴ Timothy C. Takach, email interview by author, February 11, 2019.

⁵⁵ Michael J. Mills, email interview by author, February 8, 2019.

⁵⁶ Alex Berko, email interview by author, February 9, 2019.

APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW RESPONSES: MICHAEL J. MILLS

Email Interview with Michael J. Mills

February 8, 2019, 12:31 PM

Participants:

TH = Theodore Hicks (trhicks@anderson.edu)

MM = Michael J. Mills (millsmic@usd437.net)

TH: Did you study composition formally, and if so, with whom?

MM: My first composition "lessons" came when I was in High School. I was really interested in arranging pieces for choir and my high school choir director, Erin Tall, was gracious enough to allow me to experiment with our chamber choir. She would give me feedback regarding what would work and what wouldn't. She kept hammering me on parallel 5ths and octaves. We were singing Moses Hogan's Elijah Rock at the time so I kept shooting that back at her. Ha!

I studied composition a little more my first few years in college with Dean Madsen at Utah State University. I really enjoyed my time with him. He was direct while still kind. He introduced me to chords by 4ths and 5ths rather than just triads. I worked on a few projects with him, but he retired at the end of my sophomore year and I transferred schools. That was the last time I studied composition formally.

TH: What can you tell me about this particular piece ("Crossing the Bar") that one may not be able to discern from the score? What are some things you'd like to share from working on this composition (related only to the work itself)?

MM: This piece took me a long time to come together. The intro and the general melody were the first pieces to come together. But, it was a good while before anything else came in. The second verse chorus parts were modeled off Ronald Staheli's arrangement of "Peace Like a River." The last piece of the puzzle was the scripture section. I had nothing there but felt like there was something needed. I was at church one Sunday morning and ideas started coming together. I was the organist, so it was slightly tortuous to have to wait until the service was over to actually hit the keyboard and iron out the details. I love Tennyson's text and, for me, it reaffirms my faith that death is not an end, but a transition. I loved being able to bible verses that speak it so clearly.

TH: In composing a choral work (in general), what informs your musical and artistic decisions when it comes to selecting certain compositional techniques?

MM: Text. If music doesn't match the text, it bugs me. I like to study the text and learn what it means to me before setting it to music.

TH: Which composer do you find to be the most influential on your compositional style?

MM: I'm not sure I have a specific composer that has influenced my style. I love studying all forms of choral music. I am a high school choral director and, as I prepare for rehearsing pieces, I also look at them with a compositional eye as well.

I guess, if I had to choose one composer that I feel like has influenced me is Johannes Brahms. It's not necessarily his compositional style, but his compositional process. I read that he did the majority of his composing away from a piano. He would take walks in the woods and do much of his composing in his head and then come back to the keyboard to test out his ideas. I feel like I do some of my best composing as I'm going about doing other things.

APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW RESPONSES: ALEX BERKO

Email Interview with Alex Berko

February 9, 2019, 6:36 PM

Participants:

TH = Theodore Hicks (trhicks@anderson.edu)

AB = Alex Berko (alexberkomusic@gmail.com)

TH: Did you study composition formally, and if so, with whom?

AB: Yes, I started studying composition privately with a professor at Cleveland State University (Stephen Stanziano) when I was 12 years old. The summer of my junior year at high school, I attended Interlochen Arts Camp in Michigan which sealed the idea that I wanted to be a composer and continue studying in college. Later in high school, I studied at Cleveland Institute of Music (Keith Fitch) and attended Indiana University for my BM in Composition (Don Freund, Aaron Travers, Claude Baker, David Dzubay).

TH: What can you tell me about this particular piece ("Luna's Lullaby") that one may not be able to discern from the score? What are some things you'd like to share from working on this composition (related only to the work itself)?

AB: Luna's Lullaby was my first piece for choir and was written during my senior year of high school. This piece to me is an amalgamation of my influences at the time. I think that like many young composers, I pulled hard from the music and composers I loved at the time. The main one being Eric Whitacre (discussed in more detail below). Other influences were vocal jazz music (Singers Unlimited in particular--look at m.23 in the score and other moments where I have Major 7th chords voiced somewhat derivatively of Gene Puerling) and a little bit of barbershop: the very end of the piece is faintly like similar to a tag in barbershop where you have that C as the "post" and the other voices shift the harmony around that C as a common tone. It's a bit of a stretch but admittedly, my experience singing barbershop in high school helped me decide to make that choice as a composer.

The other compositional technique I was working with at the time was the idea of text painting: the basic premise that musical decisions are made to encapsulate certain words or phrases in the text. I had written a piece for voice and piano so I had played with setting text and, but when dealing with choir, there were all sorts of new textural possibilities that I was excited to explore. For example, the text that reads: "yet the dawn is arriving, the sun is arising, the day is reviving, and ah!" I tried to musically represent a sunrise. I did this by creating a canon with varied entrances and to make things more complicated, the rhythms do not overlap in the most "friendly way". I later learned that this is a technique that composer Gyorgy Ligeti used called micropolyphony in which individual voices moved against one another in very tight rhythmic canons to create a busy and dense texture. Sometimes, these voices could even move at varying tempos to create even more chaos. This proved to be a difficult spot to sing (particularly the soprano and alto lines starting in

measure 76. As you can see, they are singing the same rhythms, but "off" by one eighth note.) This texture evolves over the course of about 20 measures, growing in range, dynamic, and number of voices and climaxes with the "dream" chords first heard in m.27. Another spot that illustrates text painting is m.60-61: "this wistful world is not as it seems". There is a rather stark harmonic shift at "not as it seems" to highlight that bit of text. Overall, I tried to capture this global feeling of spaciousness, sweetness, and ethereal-ness that Jessica's words brought out.

TH: In composing a choral work (in general), what informs your musical and artistic decisions when it comes to selecting certain compositional techniques?

AB: The text. Always. A colleague once shared with me that choosing the text is half the work in writing the choral piece and I couldn't agree more. Finding the right words to set is a difficult task, but once you've landed on them, I've found that a lot of the piece starts to write itself. A former teacher of mine also describes the process of writing a piece with text as a collaboration between you (the composer) and the poet. I think that's a beautiful way to look at it. When the poet sat down and wrote those words, they imagined an entire world unfolding in their mind. As the composer, it's your job to honor and enhance that world instead of ignoring it and potentially disrupting, destroying, or disregarding the poet's own thoughts. This is why I love to work with living poets--the collaboration seems more organic to me instead of having to guess on the intentions of the poet. (Jessica Stone was a poet at my high school and I asked if she would want to work with me to write text for a choral piece--so that's where this specific text comes from). Don't get me wrong, I still love using older text as well, but I find it fascinating to pick the brain of a living poet as I go about my process.

TH: Which composer do you find to be the most influential on your compositional style?

AB: I think it's fairly obvious from the harmonic language that Eric Whitacre was a clear influence. At the time, we were singing a good amount of his music in choir and I hadn't heard anything like it. The more I've talked to composers of choir, I've found that nearly all of them have been influenced by Eric Whitacre in some way or another and have AT LEAST one "Whitacre"-inspired piece in their catalogue. I think I was particularly drawn to him because I naturally gravitate to a sound in my writing that is based in elements of contemporary pop music and when I heard Whitacre and realized that he was essentially writing glorified slowed-down pop music with all sorts of extended harmonies/clusters (perhaps a fairly gross generalization), it scratched all sorts of itches for me. The Whitacre piece I studied closest was *Cloudburst* (note the instrumentation similarities and the big build to the climax). The other composer/piece I heard around the time I wrote this was Caroline Shaw's *Partita for 8 Voices*. The way she deals with the human voice in that piece was and still is a big inspiration to me. The most clear spot in my piece that relates to her writing is the moment where the choir gradually shifts vowels in an attempt to create an overtone sweep.

APPENDIX C - INTERVIEW RESPONSES: TIMOTHY C. TAKACH

Email Interview with Timothy C. Takach

February 11, 2019, 12:00 PM

Participants:

TH = Theodore Hicks (trhicks@anderson.edu)

TT = Timothy C. Takach (tim@timothyctakach.com)

TH: Did you study composition formally, and if so, with whom?

TT: I studied composition at St. Olaf College with Timothy Mahr. I've also taken lessons with Mary Ellen Childs and Libby Larsen.

TH: What can you tell me about this particular piece ("Neither Angels, Nor Demons, Nor Powers") that one may not be able to discern from the score? What are some things you'd like to share from working on this composition (related only to the work itself)?

TT: The basis of the piece, musically, comes from the idea that we are saying goodbye to someone who has gone on. We don't know where, but that journey in the piece is depicted with a rising 4th. You can hear this outline several times in the melodies throughout, and also in the harmonic progressions. At the end, instead of cadencing on the tonic chord, I leave the listener on the IV chord, residing in that post-earthly place.

TH: In composing a choral work (in general), what informs your musical and artistic decisions when it comes to selecting certain compositional techniques?

TT: I mostly start from the text - what kind of images does it suggest? Is it structure in a way that would benefit from melody, texture, rhythm, long lines, counterpoint? Where is the climax of the piece, and what might the music sound like when we get there? I'm very conscious of the fact that music is temporal - we don't get a chance to go back and listen to a part again, like we could if we were reading a poem. The audience gets one chance, in real time, to comprehend the text. It's my job to make sure that happens, and so that informs how discernible the text needs to be at any point. Now with all that said, there are a few times when, without a text in mind, I think, "I want to write a piece that does ____." And so armed with a certain musical technique in mind, I'll go out in search of a text that might benefit from that particular treatment. But the two still have to support each other. For "Neither Angels," the text sits out front, and the piece is through composed, so the thread of the narrative is never lost. The "And I believe, so I believe" sections are like glue, binding the piece together.

TH: Which composer do you find to be the most influential on your compositional style, if any?

TT: Latvian composer Uģis Prauliņš is one of my favorites. I only have a couple of his larger works on recording to listen to, but I like his mix of styles, his counterpoint, and his

pacing. For me it's really intriguing writing, and it leaves me wanting to know what happens next. What a great feeling to have! It's a feeling that we don't often get when listening to new music.

APPENDIX D - INTERVIEW RESPONSES: ROBERT KLOSTERMAN

Email Interview with Robert Klosterman

March 21, 2019, 11:05 AM

Participants:

TH = Theodore Hicks (trhicks2@bsu.edu)

RK = Robert Klosterman (reklosterman@bsu.edu)

TH: What idea or event inspired you to write the poem?

RK: I was inspired to write this poem after partaking in a spiritual retreat in September of 2018. The scene I saw on that retreat reflected the scene I wrote about in the poem. I say “reflected” because the physical “Glade” that I saw at the campsite points to the heavenly “glade” I hope to reach one day (heavenly glade being metaphorical for a place of eternal rest in heaven with God). On the retreat I saw grassy hills, a beautiful horizon, towering cumulus clouds, and the Sun beaming softly with warmth. And upon relaxing in a hammock, reading a good book, I looked up to see this sight and found the inspiration to write this poem.

TH: What are some of the techniques and literary example you utilized in creating the poem?

RK: In the first stanza, I use an alliteration, “wander through winding wooded paths” to set up/stress the confusion of the setting. I use the double meaning of the homophone wander/wonder, one meaning to walk aimlessly, almost searching with the other meaning to ponder or think about something. For the phrase “under a deep blue mind, I find clarity of sky” I wanted to show that at reaching this point in life there was no difference between mind and sky and their clarities, so I simply switched the words. A few perfect and forced rhymes were used to create a good pattern and flow to the wording. The word “thrum” can morph into an onomatopoeia to describe the meaning of the word, which represents the feeling and energy of the scene. I thought of “turning, taking, breathing, making” in a cinematic sense, as if the camera were to pan around the viewer of the scene as he/she takes in the sight.

TH: What can you tell me about this poem that the reader may not discern from reading on their own?

RK: The symbolism of the term “Glade” used in the poem implies a place of rest, as the surrounding forest symbolizes the tumult and confusion of a life not yet with God. “Arching branches obscure my vision” is a metaphor for that strife, turmoil and confusion. What people probably would not guess are how strong the Christian undertones are. The clear presence of this theme is through the mention of seraphs and Heaven itself. I also wrote about a strife over which my spirit will eventually transcend; this alludes to the Resurrection of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ in which we will no longer suffer but rather live in eternal rest and bliss with Him. Another allusion to the Second Coming is

through the phrase “with the Sun, alight and golden.” The Sun is capitalized for Jesus Christ, golden for His divinity, and alight, meaning to descend from flight, as if he were to descend to Earth once more. Lastly, the Sun is what creates the gentle “gleam of light” (the original meaning of the word glade, of which I wrote unintentionally) which leads the soul onward. And with eyes ever fixed on Christ, how can we not but find ourselves in the midst of Heaven.

TH: Because I had asked you to write a text, did you find yourself making artistic decisions based on the idea that it might be set to music?

RK: Initially, I was imagining every phrase, stanza, and word as if it were to be put to music, but to the music of my own thoughts... not the music of the person who would be writing it (Theo). This proved rather difficult having something in mind and knowing that someone else would be putting their own melody and harmony to my words, not in a possessive sense but rather in constructive sense. Because of my thought on what the music would sound like, it was difficult to place any definite meter to the poem. So, I was bouncing different words and phrases around that seemed rather forced and unfitting, until I was struck with the inspiration of the words I used in the poem. Once I had that thought/idea/theme, phrases rolled off the mind almost perfectly in a rather uncanny fashion, flowing with both meter and meaning that resonated with me. At this point, I didn't have to worry about setting the words to music. The poem could simply exist on its own, making it a great way for Theo to compose the piece in the masterful way that he did.

TH: How much did that idea influence your writing, if at all?

RK: It only influenced my writing up until the point where I had a coherent thought and theme about which I wanted to write. After I found that thought, there was little to no influence.

APPENDIX E - "THE GLADE" POEM BY ROBERT KLOSTERMAN

I wander through winding, wooded paths.
Arching branches obscure my vision.
My unsure footfalls tramp heavily downward
while streaming light leads me ever onward.

The treeline breaks, my soul aches, for a place set before me.
The leaves part, and within my heart, the space foreseen opening.
I pause in awe of the pleasant sights:

Beauty rolls over grassy hills, leading to distant horizons,
Up to towering citadels of white, that seraphs call their home.

I stroll and wonder, found in thought,
turning, taking, breathing, making, myself, my life anew.

Under a deep blue mind, I find clarity of sky
As my spirit transcends the strife foretold.

The beholden world steadily thrums, with the Sun, alight and golden.
I smile with joy for I've found rest
in the midst of Heaven: The Glade.

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